(b) The question doesn't arise.

(c) and (d) A High Level Committee is examining certain alternatives. The final decision is yet to be taken.

Withdrawal of orders issued under Essential Commodities Act

2696. SHRI C.P. THIRUNAVUKKARASU: Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Union Government have decided to withdraw all orders issued by different States under the Essential Commodities Act;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) the reasons for their withdrawal;

(d) whether the State Governments were consulted in this regard; and

(e) if so, the views of the State Governments thereon?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI V. SREENIVASA PRASAD): (a) to (c) The Central Government has issued an order under the Essential Commodities Act, 195S allowing dealers to freely buy, stock, sell, transport, distribute, dispose, etc. any quantity in respect of wheat, paddy/rice, coarse grains, sugar, edible oilseeds and edible oils without requiring any license or permit therefor under any order issued under the Act. The Order took effect after thirty days from the date of its issue (15.2.2002) notwithstanding anything to the contrary in any Order made by a State Government before the commencement of the Order. Facilitating free trade and movement of foodgrains would enable farmers to get best prices for their produce, achieve price stability and ensure availability of foodgrains in deficit areas.

(d) and (e) The need to relax various controls on agricultural products including controls on inter-State movement of such products was discussed in the Conference of Chief Ministers held on 21.5.2001

and thereafter in the Standing Committee of some Union Ministers and Chief Ministers which was set up pursuant to the recommendations made in the Conference of Chief Ministers. The Standing Committee has suggested that the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 may continue as an umbrella legislation for the Centre and the States to use when needed, but a progressive dismantling of controls and restrictions was also required.

Pakistan's objection to Indo-Israel cooperation

2697. SHRI K. RAMA MOHANA RAO: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have noticed that Pakistan has objected to defence cooperation between India and Israel;

(b) if so, the details in this regard; and

(c) what has been Israel's response to Pakistan's objection?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) to (c) Pakistani officials have, from time to time, sought to make propagandist statements about the nature of the legitimate cooperation between India and Israel which is based on national interest and sovereign decision making in both countries. India determines the nature of its relations with other countries solely on the basis of its supreme national interest.

Consulate of Gulf Countries in Kerala

2698. SHRI N.K. PREM ACH AND RAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether any proposal to start a consulate of Gulf countries in Kerala is pending;

(b) whether any representation/demand for the same has been received from Kerala; and

(c) The details in this regard and Governments reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) No, Sir.